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THE CHURCH AND THE PRESENT-DAY LABOR STRUGGLE

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Mr. Williams is one of the most representative men in the field of industrial arbitration. He is the financial arbitrator of the United Mine Workers of America No. 12, and of the Illinois Coal Operators' Association. He is also chairman of the Board of Arbitration of Hart, Schaffner & Marx and their Garment Workers' Union. He is a member of the Illinois State Mining Investigation Commission, and was vice-chairman of the Cherry Commission. In addition to these activities he is chairman of the Sunday Evening Course given regularly in Streator, and is president of the Illinois Unitarian Conference.

It is not probable that all of our readers will agree with all of Mr. Williams' opinions, particularly in some of his incidental statements, but we most earnestly commend the careful reading of his article by anyone who wishes to understand the present situation in the labor world and to gain an intelligent idea as to what part the church can actually take in the labor struggle.

What is the present-day labor struggle?

In its essence it is a struggle for power. In the past the power has been in the hands of the employer. In the future it is going to be in the hands of the laborer. Today we are in the midst of the struggle over the transfer. Labor demands more power: capital refuses to part with it. Conflict inevitably ensues and when the fight is over it is found that labor has advanced—if not directly in power, at least in that hunger for power which is sure of realization later.

In my town last spring a small group of public service employees struck against a giant corporation. They struck not for more wages, but for the recognition of their union. Some of their leaders asked me if they were not right in striking for so great a cause.

I replied: "It is not a question of right but of might. No employer will recognize a union because he wants to; but only because he has to. As it is he has all the power in his own hands. When he recognizes your union he divides his power with you. He won't do it if he can help it."

There was trial of strength and the men lost. They went back to work without recognition of their union. But let it not be imagined that defeat diminished the craving which caused the strike. It only deepened the sense of injustice, only whetted the hunger for a share of that power which the conviction of the age has declared to be the workman's right. When the propitious time comes that hunger will express itself again, there will be another strike, and the next time the issue may be different.

The Struggle in the Garment Industry

I spent three months of last summer trying to adjust the balance of power in a large and complicated industry. Rather than face a long and possibly disastrous strike the employers had consented to share a portion of their power with the workers. Here again it was not a question of wages, but of recognition of the union in its extreme form, that is, in the form of the "closed shop." Rather than part with as much power as was implied in the "closed shop" the company at first was ready to fight, but the matter was compromised on the basis of the "preferential" shop. The degree of "preference" to be granted was to be left to a board of arbitration, of which I was chairman. In listening to the arguments I found that "preference" was only a synonym for power, and that I was umpire in a contest which involved a transfer of power from the employer to the laborer. The employer in this case was more than usually liberal, progressive, and desirous of establishing sympathetic and co-operative relations with the workers; the labor leaders were intelligent, constructive, idealistic, and without a thought or an interest that was not devoted to the well-being of their comrades.

Yet despite the evident intelligence and sincerity on both sides they could not for a long time be brought to agree on a division of power. The company urged with great persistence and earnestness that to grant the workers' demands would lower the quality of work, weaken shop discipline, increase cost of production, and probably cripple or destroy the business. The labor leaders with equal emphasis insisted that without

increased power they would be unable to protect their membership against discrimination, oppression, and exactions of various kinds that would reduce their earning power. They scorned the assurances of the company that they would be treated justly and generously, and demanded that they be placed in a position where they would not be dependent on the generous moods or sentiments of the company.

No one could listen to the arguments without being convinced that both sides were potentially right. No doubt the employers had oppressed the workers in the past and might do so again. No doubt the transfer of power asked by the labor leaders might enable them to wreck the business if they used it recklessly or unwisely.

How could the leaders be trusted?

They were at the head of several thousand workers, mostly composed of new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe—Russian Jews, Lithuanians, Roumanians, Poles, Italians, and the like. The leaders were themselves strangers who had hardly mastered the language—only six or eight years from a land where factories and trade unions were unknown.

Were the fears of the employers unfounded? By no means. They had a right to dread the passing of power from the hands of their trusted foremen and superintendents to those of these new recruits in our industrial army. What havoc they might cause in a highly complicated and delicately balanced organization might well give rise to profound misgivings. It was no arrogant vaunt of "running their own business" that made the employers

pause. They had long passed that point, and no longer stood out for individualistic control. But to transfer to the union power over hiring and discharge, over the balancing of sections, over standards of workmanship—this was a plunge they could not bring themselves willingly to take.

And yet it was a plunge they must take. At least it so seemed to those who had the responsibility of deciding the matter, and for these reasons:

1. The workers could possibly compel their demands by force. Their successful eighteen weeks' strike of two years ago, and the unanimous strike vote of last spring pointed to their ability to capture the coveted power by their own might.

2. The preferential agreement signed by the company in order to avert a strike implied that additional power was to be transferred to the union.

3. Two years of constructive work, and the self-restraint shown by their refusal to go to war when they had a strike vote in their hands proved them to be unionists of rare and unusual quality. The leaders were men whom the suspicion of graft had never tainted, men of lofty ethical ideals, men not yet permeated by the sordid commercial spirit of the age, which even the trade union of today, alas! has not escaped—and it seemed as if they had earned the right to a greater power over the direction of the interests of their fellow-workers than had yet been granted them.

It is not the purpose of this paper, however, to give an account of our struggle for peace in the garment industry. The experiment is still in progress, and there may be many chapters to

write before the end of the story is reached. I refer to it only for the purpose of showing what my intimate contact with that phase of the labor struggle has revealed to me. And the most significant features of the present-day revolution seem to me to be these:

Labor Adopts the Ethics of Business

The passing of power from the employer to the laborer is going on visibly and obviously before us. What is not so obvious is that with this transfer of power is passing also the economic motive, the self-regarding interest, the anti-social attitude of the employer. The worker is adopting the centrifugal ethics of his master, and the question is: What is to keep society from flying apart? With the laboring class permeated with the anti-social motive of the business world, where are we to find the cohesive power to hold us together, and to keep us from drifting to chaos?

This, it seems to me, is the most important question that the present-day labor struggle suggests. The motive taught by the orthodox political economy of our time is being frankly accepted by the worker. If the successful business man will buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market, so will the laborer. If he will drive the shrewdest possible bargain by fraud, force, or cunning, why not the laborer? If the holder of public office will graft and steal and be smiled upon in his success, why not the walking delegate? If the giant corporation will crush its rival without hindrance, if it will monopolize the market and exploit the consumer for its own profit, why may not the giant trade union do the same thing?

The Coercion of Public Opinion

In a life-span of sixty years I have been a witness of a remarkable change in a great industry. When a young man I worked for fifteen years at the trade of coal mining. In those days the miners were nearly all of the British nativity—English, Irish, Scotch, or Welsh. In those days mining was a skilled trade. We dug the coal with our hands, our picks, and our brains. I well recall the pride of craftsmanship among us, how we used to sit in the evenings and revel in exploits of coal mining, how the popular hero was the man who had done a prodigious day's work, who could shear the straightest rib, who could undercut the deepest mining, who was the deftest, cleverest with his tools, or who was the mightiest and most enduring in his strength and energy. I recall that it was a disgrace to be thought lazy, to be a shirker of work, to be unfit to do a good job and turn out a workmanlike product; and I remember how I responded to that public opinion in my own reactions. At this distance I am safe in admitting what then I should have been ashamed to confess—that I entered the mines at an early age with reluctance, that I remained there with dread at times amounting to loathing, and that I escaped at the first favorable opportunity. How I hated the five o'clock whistle that called me to work in the morning, and rejoiced when it blew the single toot that announced no work that day! And yet with all this violent revolt against the drudgery of the mines, so sensitive was I to the opinion of my fellows that I dared not fall below the standards they had set. It goaded me to be industrious when I fain would

have shirked, to become expert with tools when, without natural aptitude, I might have been a coal butcher instead of a miner. That I averaged well with my class was not due to innate virtue, but to the pressure of the public opinion about me.

We all live up to the expectation of our fellows, whether at work or at play, and my early experience is only an illustration of that fact. What happens to us if that expectation changes, if the standard of public opinion is lowered? When the lucky, the cunning, the rapacious are honored more than the productive, the industrious, and the socially useful, what may we expect? When the ethics of business come to be those of labor, what may we look for?

Coming of the New Immigrant

I have lived to see the standards wholly changed in my trade. With the coming of the machine drill and the machine coal-cutter mining as a skilled trade passed out. With the passing of the pick and the hand tools passed also the British miner, and in his place came the immigrant hordes from Eastern and Southern Europe. To follow the machine needs only brawn, and so brains betook themselves to other callings. Not only has this happened in mining, but in other occupations where machinery has superseded skill. A prominent glass manufacturer told me recently that it was now impossible to find American or English-speaking help to look after the machines. He said it was a matter of wonder and concern among manufacturers where this class of help had gone to. "The American

will no longer work at common labor," he asserted, and it was a matter of fierce competition among employers to get a share of the incoming immigrants to do the work.

Now the point that concerns us is that these are the men who are to operate the trade unions of this country. It is to such as these that the power over industry is to be transferred. Is it any wonder that employers gasp? Indeed, trade-union leaders are hardly less disturbed. In the state of Illinois this year the miners' union presented a bill in the legislature requiring that hereafter no one could obtain a miner's certificate unless he could pass an examination in the English language. It was passed as a safety measure, but no one can escape the question that must have been in the minds of the leaders: How can democracy and self-government as represented in the union be carried on by people who cannot speak our language and who come from countries where both are unknown?

The Corruption of the Laborer

But it is not only the change in the character of the laborer we have to consider. It is that other appalling thing—his acceptance of the business man's ethics. This may not have fully penetrated the lower strata of labor as yet, but in most of the higher ranks it is in full control. Self-interest, enlightened or unenlightened, is the motive in nearly every organized craft, and a union in one trade is a union against every other trade. The business man has taught the laborer his dearest maxim: "To get as much as you can and give as little as you must." Is it any wonder that

the worker believes in restriction of output, in making the job last as long as possible, in making labor scarce so that wages will be high? Is it any wonder that his business agent becomes the willing pupil of the business grafter? If a builder offers him a bonus to call a strike on a rival builder why shouldn't he take it? If the contractor has taken a job below price or under a too short time-limit, why shouldn't the business agent help him out by a jurisdictional strike so that he may collect extras or get an extension of time? And if he may do these things, why not engineer a straight hold-up, and refuse to start the men to work until a certain number of hundred or thousand dollars are paid him? Why not, if "business is business" and he plays the game as it is played by his superiors?

These are ugly questions, but they are not questions to be shirked or evaded. And there is worse to follow. For if the taint has reached the labor leader, how can the laborer escape? Why do good work if he can force equal pay for bad work? Why work at all if he can escape it? No man likes to work at an enforced task; certainly no one loves the dull, uninteresting monotony of tending a machine. Tyrannous pressure alone holds him to it—social or economic coercion of one sort or another. Relax that pressure, diminish that coercion, transfer the power that compels from the employer to the laborer, and how is the world's work going to get done? It matters not whether the power be lodged in a trade union or in a socialized state as the Socialists demand, the question of providing an adequate motive for the

endurance of drudgery is not to be escaped. Under the existing system the large profits to employers is the price laborers have had to pay for task-masters to lash them into activity. Without adequate internal incentive to incite them to toil, they have had to pay enormous bonuses to captains of industry to coerce them to their tasks. But with the transfer of power into their hands, will they continue to hire their drivers? And if they do, will they obey them? And if they don't, how is society going to help itself? Ask the I.W.W.

What the Trade Union Has Done

Let me not be misunderstood. Nothing I have said herein is an argument against trade unionism. I believe the trade union to be not only inevitable but indispensable. Without it our economic system would be, as Carlyle called it, "anarchy plus the constable." In its propaganda it has moved men to as holy enthusiasms as ever did a crusade or a religious revival. In its working it has generated more ethical power than many of our latter-day churches or religious societies. It has introduced rationality into economics, given it the semblance of a logical rationale, put competition of flesh and blood on a different plane from that of commodities. It has forced conceptions of justice and humanity on dry and barren doctrinaires who would have computed sweat and toil in foot pounds, and reduced palpitating hearts and muscles to an empty abstraction—the economic man. I have seen the theory of free competition in labor pushed to its logical ultimate. I have seen mining villages devastated by it, miners on starvation wages, mine-

owners on the verge of bankruptcy. Before the strike of 1897 a coal mine in a town was often a liability rather than an asset to the community. Miners could not pay their debts to the merchants, and many of them, robbed of their natural pride and self-respect, were recipients of poor relief from the county. All this was the fruit of the theory that an employer had the right to take his employee's labor into market and sell it at any price that was necessary to get the business. Cut and counter-cut was the rule of trade, underbid and undersell, get the business at any price was the maxim of the employer. And why not? The labor that he trafficked in was not his own. The sweat, the privation, the pinched belly didn't hurt him, except as he happened to be human, and even then he had to put the screws down as hard as his most vicious competitor or be driven out of business.

But the monstrous thing had to end. The strike of 1897 did it, and out of it grew the national organization of the United Mine Workers. Since then there has been a general improvement in wages, hours, and conditions, which has put the miners on a relatively fair level with other workers of America. Though not always right, the United Mine Workers has been on the whole ably and honestly managed; but even if it were not, I should still be for it, for I could hardly conceive an amount of tyranny or crookedness that would be so disastrous as the unorganized condition previous to 1897.

A School of Ethics

In what I shall say, therefore, it must be understood that I am for trade

organizations as an indispensable part of our economic system. At their best they are the most efficient school of ethics that we have; even at their worst they compel their members to forego immediate personal interest in the interest of the group. But in the better organizations they go much farther than that. In the union with which I have the honor to be associated I may say it has become a school in co-operative management. With its trade agreement, its trade board and board of arbitration, it has been educated in the rights of business as well as in the rights of labor. With its scores of shop chairmen participating in the adjustment of grievances, its active and intelligent deputies, its arbitrators and trade-board members, it is educating not only itself but its employers. During the two years of the last trade agreement the price committee fixed prices in 367 instances without recourse to the board, while the board made decisions which were cheerfully accepted in 170 cases. In the garment industry with its new immigrants, its new union with its new problems, and its freedom from old traditions, we have the promise of a better ideal, a better ethics, a better vision in the labor movement.

Do you wonder that I deplore the spread of the business man's ethics into such an organization as this? The new immigrant comes here fired with the vision of a free America. The union he has created is suffused with an idealism as yet undominated by the sordid motives of trade, or hardened by the bitter conflict which has driven the generous spirit out of many of the older organizations. Touch him with the

current business motive and his sentiment becomes sterile. He will no longer care to stitch his morality into his garments. For under this motive what matters it that his brother workman is cheated in his coat? What matter that his fellow-unionist must wear an ill-made, ill-fitting suit, any more than it matters to a miner that some starving, freezing widow must pay her last penny for coal that is half dirt and stone? Or, to carry it farther, if "the devil take the hindmost" is to be the law of the trade union, why blame the brakeman for not walking back a half-mile with his signal when a hundred yards is so much easier—and no one will be the wiser unless there is a rear-end collision as in the New Haven Railroad disaster? It is true that his comrade, his brother, may be the mangled victim of his shirking, but where in the law of business is it written that a man is his brother's keeper?

A Slave Morality

It begins to be apparent how the labor struggle touches the church. In the past the church has been one of the powerful agencies of repression. It has furnished the employer with a justification for his exactions, and the laborer a consolation for his woes. It has taught the toiler to bend his back to the burden, and the reward that was denied today was promised in the sweet by-and-by. "Servants obey your masters" was the admonition, and be humble, meek, non-resistant, think not of the morrow, lay up your treasures not on earth but in heaven—these were the anaesthetics of the church. It was a "slave morality," as Nietzsche called it, but no one can

doubt that it helped to hold the laborer to his job, and even to find some satisfaction therein. For was it not promised that they who had a hard time here would have a good time hereafter? Did not Lazarus see Dives in hell, and was it not affirmed in Holy Writ that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven?

Self-regarding Motive Breaks Down

So remote seem these teachings today that it is almost an ungenerous taunt to recall them. Yet it is not so intended. There is no doubt that for centuries the church provided the reluctant worker with some of the most powerful incentives to effort. Perhaps through the slowly evolving ages society could devise no better motive, or if it could, the toiler would be unable to respond to it. But it all belongs to a dead age—never again to be recalled. The serious fact we now have to confront is that the whole range of motives furnished by the church of yesterday is discredited and impotent. Where along the red battle front of modern industrial war has the church carried as much as a flag of truce? At Lawrence, at Patterson, in West Virginia, where was the religious teacher of yesterday? What zealot would go up to the copper country today and offer the strikers heaven or hell as a substitute for wages? What theory of the atonement or the cleansing blood of Christ would stay the rebellion of the Colorado miners? How remote, how unreal it all seems. How much nearer, how much more vital and human is the action of the Illinois miners in sending a hundred thousand dollars to each group of

struggling comrades in Colorado and Michigan.

The problem of the church today is: How can it again get that nearness, that vital contact with the hearts of men, which it has lost? How overcome that indifference, that hostility, which the class-conscious worker feels toward it? How justify its existence in the new world of interests and ideals in which it finds itself today?

I have put the difficulties of its position strongly, but, I hope, not discouragingly. If the church must abandon its old landmarks it is only doing what every social movement of our day is doing. If it must cut loose from a morality which has become immoral, it obeys here also the inevitable trend of the age. For if there is anything the progress of the labor movement has compelled us to see, it is that the self-regarding motive as the sole basis of economics has broken down. Neither in religion nor industry is it longer possible. As soon as it proceeds to its logical ultimate, and is accepted as the working-creed of the laborer, anarchy at once engulfs us. Sun-clear is the dictum of the age that the atomistic view of the self is no longer possible, that human interest must attach itself to something larger than the ego, that devotion to something beyond the individual good is necessary to the salvation of society.

Where Labor Problems Become Religious

Here the church finds itself on its own ground and the labor question becomes a religious problem. How can the church help to answer the question? Not by publishing social programs,

by propagating panaceas, by devising legislative schemes, or by preaching political remedies. Its function is far deeper, far more fundamental than that. It is by reaching down into those springs of power from which all actions come; it is by tapping those fountains of energy from which all issues flow; it is by generating those currents of sympathy by which all values are transvaluated. To put it briefly: From what has been said it is clear that the main features of the present-day labor struggle may be summed up thus:

1. That the power in industry is being transferred from the employer to the laborer.

2. That with the transfer of power is transferred also the economic motive—to get all you can and give as little as you must.

3. That when applied to labor the self-regarding motive will break down, and will be shown to be utterly impotent to do the world's work.

4. That the salvation of society depends on the development of an other-regarding motive, an internal incentive that will urge to effort when social and economic coercions are no longer able to compel.

Intimations of such a motive have never been wanting in human society, and never have its manifestations been so abundant or so fruitful as at present. The self-consuming labors of artists, scientists, publicists testify overwhelmingly to the presence of an incentive which laughs at money, and scorns financial success. The superb self-forgetfulness of the great army of social workers who give of time, money, and effort, without stint and without re-

ward, is another monument to its power. Consider, also, the devotees of the innumerable causes of our time, political, social, religious. Think of the millions of socialists, the great army of trade-unionists, the host of uplifters of every rank and grade—all touched by some vision of the Holy Grail, all possessed by some spirit larger than their own. Think of the modern mystics, transcendentalists, idealists, theosophists, Christian Scientists, New Thoughtists—the endless medley of faddists and freaks of every metaphysical shade and description—all bent on proving that the heart of being is good, and all intent on showing man's kinship with a Self that is infinite and eternal.

The Age Is Religious

In the presence of these and other religious manifestations of our time dare we say that the age is irreligious? Dare we say that we have not here the promise and potency of a spiritual power that is to re-create industry and regenerate society; that we have not here the elements from which a new renaissance of religion will arise, a renaissance that will sweep from the arena of action the petty ambitions and values that dominate it; that will give new aims, new enthusiasms, new incentives to effort, and furnish an ideal of success that will be a man's size?

Let the church of tomorrow lift its head from the shadows. Let it rise to the majesty of its mission. From the cave of superstition let it emerge; from the fear of knowledge let it be freed. Bondage of dead men's thoughts, dread of superman's daring, apprehension of the good that is "beyond good and evil"

—from all these let it be delivered. With its face to the morning let it stand forth erect and unafraid, champion and interpreter of life—the good life, the common life, the one life that throbs in the heart of man, that shines in the shimmering star, that flows unbroken down the ages from a timeless beginning to an endless eternity.

In its presence the illusions of self will fall. By its illumination will man see that he is not a thing of shreds and patches, but part of the creative power of the universe; not a bit of pink protoplasm bounded on the outside by skin and the inside by atoms, but a point focalized in time of that unbounded soul stuff of which he has hitherto conceived his gods to be made. With such a vision he can as little play with dollars

as he can with the glass beads and wampum of the savage. The thirst of creation will be on him. Hoarding of millions, building of fortunes, will seem trivial; nothing will satisfy but the building of cities, states, civilizations; the creation of arts, laws, institutions; the establishment of industrial and social systems that will afford a fit environment for the evolving and enlarging life, that will make of earth a paradise of opportunity, and of man a co-worker with God in the creation of the cosmos.

Can the modern church kindle the vision, awaken the consciousness, inflame the enthusiasm that will generate this renaissance? If it can, it will so make its greatest contribution to the forces that are working to humanize the labor struggle of today.

A NEW TESTAMENT ANNIVERSARY: 1514–1914

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The year 1914 marks the four-hundredth anniversary of the first printing of the Greek New Testament. On January 10, 1514, at Alcalá de Henares, near Madrid, and under the auspices of the University of Alcalá or Complutum, the first printed edition of the New Testament in the original Greek was finished. It was a Catholic prelate, Cardinal Francisco Ximenez de Cisneros, archbishop of Toledo and archchancellor of the kingdoms of Castile, who was

responsible for the undertaking. It was part of a larger plan, instituted in 1502 in celebration of the birth of an heir to the Spanish throne. Ferdinand and Isabella had a daughter, Juana, who had married Philip the Handsome. In 1502 a son was born to them, who grew up to be the Emperor Charles V. The Cardinal's way of celebrating his birth was to set about producing at the University of Alcalá a great edition of the Bible both in its original tongues and